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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the perceptions and opinions of the 128 students who have matriculated in a competency-based reading methods course at Rhode Island College. The course presently consists of 54 objectives in 14 instructional modules. Alternate learning activities and various postassessment options are listed in each module, with the achievement of a minimum of 25 objectives required for completion of the course. The 14 modules are: stating behavioral objectives in reading, nature of the reading process, assessing performance in reading, reading readiness, basal reader, word identification, comprehension, language-experience, individualized reading, additional reading approaches, work study skills, classroom organization for individualizing instruction, readability, and children with reading difficulties. Students were asked to judge the effectiveness of the modules in preparing them to become reading teachers, the value of the different means of postassessment, and the value of the available learning activities. The four modules ranked as being most effective were reading readiness, basal reader, comprehension, and children with reading difficulties, all of which provide opportunities to work with elementary school children. (MKM)

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INITIATING AN INDIVIDUALIZED
UNDERGRADUATE READING
METHODS COURSE

Robert T. Rude
Rhode Island College

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Competency-based teacher education programs have been described as viable alternatives to more conventional teacher education programs. Unfortunately, researchers interested in measuring college classroom instructional efforts usually face the same measurement dilemma as when they try to assess classroom instruction in public school education. That is, instructional objectives are described vaguely, learning materials vary from situation to situation, and postassessment techniques are often nonexistent. In short, it is difficult to describe the program goals in specific terms, complex to determine what type of instruction transpired, and arduous to measure learning outcomes. Competency-based teacher education, with its prescribed objectives, learning activities, and assessment procedures should enable researchers to determine better the effectiveness of their instructional efforts.

At Rhode Island College, an on-going evaluation effort has been undertaken in an attempt to measure the overall effectiveness of a competency-based undergraduate reading methods course. Moreover, a more intensive effort has also been made to determine what specific

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components of the course seem to be most effective in producing knowledgeable and capable beginning teachers of reading. During the past three semesters, 128 students have enrolled in the undergraduate competency-based reading methods course. The present course has evolved into a program which consists of fifty-four objectives found in fourteen instructional modules. Within each module, alternate learning activities and various postassessment options are found. Students pace themselves through the course completing a minimum of twenty-five objectives by the completion of the semester in which they enroll. Grades in the course are based on the number of objectives attained within the semester time limit.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the perceptions of the 128 students who have matriculated in the competency-based course during the fall semesters of 1974-75, 1975-76 and the spring semester of 1975. Enrollment in the course was voluntary; conventional reading methods sections were offered at the same time. During the last week of the course, students who enroll in the competency-based sections are required to complete a sixty-five item objective questionnaire as well as a subjective questionnaire. Questions asked are related to a) the effectiveness of the modules, b) the effectiveness of the available learning activities, c) the value of the different means of postassessment and d) tangential questions related to competency-based teacher education. The purpose of this paper will be to examine the ratings of the first three areas.

Instructional Modules

As stated earlier, fourteen instructional modules constitute the content of the course. The fourteen modules are:

1. Stating Behavioral Objectives in Reading

2. Nature of the Reading Process
3. Assessing Performance in Reading
4. Reading Readiness
5. Basal Reader
6. Word Identification
7. Comprehension
8. Approaches to Reading Instruction: Language-Experience
9. Approaches to Reading Instruction: Individualized Reading
10. Additional Approaches to Reading Instruction
11. Work Study Skills
12. School and Classroom Organization for Individualizing Instruction
13. Readability
14. Children with Reading Difficulties

Within each module, one or more objectives have been delineated; a total of fifty-four objectives comprise the total course (Stieglitz and Rude, 1975). Twenty-five of the objectives have been specified as "required" objectives. All students who enroll in the course are required to complete these objectives. In addition, twenty-nine additional "optional" objectives have also been explicated. Students who wish to achieve a letter grade of B or A in the course must complete, respectively, five or nine of these objectives.

When students were asked to rank the effectiveness of the fourteen modules, the following four modules were ranked as being most effective

Insert Table 1 about here

in preparing them to become teachers of reading:

1. Reading Readiness
2. Basal Reader
3. Comprehension
4. Children with Reading Difficulties

Interestingly, all of these modules provide opportunities for the college students to work with elementary school children. The modules which

received the lowest ratings were:

1. School and Classroom Organization for Individualizing Instruction
2. Behavioral Objectives and Reading
3. Work-Study Skills.

None of these modules provide for student-pupil teaching experiences.

Learning Experiences

Eleven different learning types of learning activities have been included in the course. Usually, two or more types of learning activities have been designed to help students attain mastery of the fifty-four course objectives. The specified learning activities which have been included in the course are:

1. Professional readings
2. Live lectures
3. Seminars and group discussions
4. Individual conferences
5. Videotapes
6. Audiotapes
7. Filmstrips
8. Slides and audiotapes
9. Live demonstration lessons
10. Experiences with children
11. Manipulation of materials

Objective data collected from students over a three-semester period indicated that the most highly rated learning activity was experiences with children. Surprisingly, professional readings was also considered

Insert Table 2 about here

to be a very effective learning activity. Seminar/group discussions and individual professor-student conferences also were rated highly. Videotapes

and slides/autiotapes were rated as the least effective types of learning activities.

Postassessment

Once students have completed their chosen learning activities, they must demonstrate their mastery of the criterion objective. Mastery of an objective is demonstrated by one of six ways:

1. Written papers
2. Objective tests
3. Short-essay tests
4. Task sheets
5. Observations
6. Projects

Just as with the learning activities, there are generally two or more ways a student can demonstrate mastery for each objective.

Observations were chosen as the most favorable type of postassessment. This was rated well above the second-ranked choice, short essay tests.

Insert Table 3 about here

Projects were ranked as the third most favorable choice. The remaining choices, in their respective order, were a) written papers, b) task sheets, and c) objective tests. It is interesting to note, too, that most of the postassessment options were rated lower than were the learning activities.

Implications

These data lend support to the following recommendations, First, college professors who are designing competency-based courses--as well as conventional courses--would do well to consider including field-based experiences with public or parochial school students. Of the fourteen

modules which included contact with children were consistently rated higher than those modules which did not involve student-pupil contact. The rating of the learning activities also bears out this recommendation; experiences with children was ranked as the most effective learning experience.

A second implication which can be drawn from these data is that students do perceive professional readings as being an effective way to prepare them for roles as teachers of reading. Contrary to some conventional undergraduate reading courses, however, readings for this competency-based course are short, focused readings that relate specifically to an identified objective. Additionally, the readings are from both professional textbooks and journals. It appears as though students may be more receptive to these types of reading assignments than they are to assigned chapter readings which are sometimes used in conventional courses.

Finally, the most favorable means of postassessment (at least from the student's point-of-view) was the observation of the college students teaching lessons. Again, teachers of teachers should consider this means of evaluating their students as they enroll in their professional college courses.

One last professorial concern remains. Students who enrolled in this course tend to view the learning activities in a more favorable light than they do the postassessment options. Professors undertaking the development of competency-based courses might keep this in mind when less-than-favorable comments are made about the newly-created course. Simply being viewed a less effective aspect of a course does not imply that postassessment should be eliminated. After all, remember your perceptions when you were a student!

REFERENCES

Stieglitz, E.; and Rude, R.T. Methods and Materials in Teaching Reading: A Competency-Based Approach. Providence: Rhode Island College, 1975.

Table 1
Effectiveness of Competency-Based Modules
in Preparing Teachers of Reading

Module	Cases			Percent		
	Fall 1974 (N=41)	Spring 1975 (N=51)	Fall 1975 (N=36)	Fall 1974	Spring 1975	Fall 1975
<u>Required Modules</u>						
1. Stating Behavioral Objectives in Reading						
a. Highly effective	2	14	8	4.9	27.5	22.2
b. Moderately effective	12	11	9	29.3	21.6	25.0
c. Effective	19	21	17	46.3	41.2	47.2
d. Moderately ineffective	7	3	1	17.1	5.9	2.8
e. Highly ineffective	1	2	1	2.4	3.9	2.8
2. Nature of the Reading Process						
a. Highly effective	9	11	8	22.0	20.0	22.9
b. Moderately effective	16	18	14	39.0	36.0	40.0
c. Effective	15	17	12	36.6	34.0	34.3
d. Moderately ineffective	1	4	1	2.4	8.0	2.9
e. Highly ineffective	--	1	--	--	2.0	--
3. Assessing Performance in Reading						
a. Highly effective	13	20	15	31.7	39.2	41.7
b. Moderately effective	15	16	12	36.6	31.4	33.3
c. Effective	10	13	9	24.4	25.5	25.0
d. Moderately ineffective	3	2	--	7.3	3.9	--
e. Highly ineffective	--	--	--	--	--	--
4. Reading Readiness						
a. Highly effective	23	33	21	56.1	66.0	60.0
b. Moderately effective	10	12	9	24.4	24.0	25.7
c. Effective	5	4	3	12.2	8.0	8.6
d. Moderately ineffective	--	1	1	--	2.0	2.9
e. Highly ineffective	3	--	1	7.3	--	2.9
5. Basal Reader						
a. Highly effective	14	26	20	34.1	51.0	55.6
b. Moderately effective	14	17	9	34.1	33.3	25.0
c. Effective	7	4	6	17.1	7.8	16.7
d. Moderately ineffective	3	3	1	7.3	5.9	2.8
e. Highly ineffective	3	1	--	7.3	2.0	--

Table 1 (cont.)

	Cases			Percent		
	Fall 1974 (N=41)	Spring 1975 (N=51)	Fall 1975 (N=36)	Fall 1974 1974	Spring 1975	Fall 1975
6. Word Identification						
a. Highly effective	16	24	18	39.0	47.1	50.0
b. Moderately effective	14	12	9	34.1	23.5	25.0
c. Effective	8	14	8	19.5	27.5	22.2
d. Moderately ineffective	1	1	1	2.4	2.0	2.8
e. Highly ineffective	2	--	--	4.9	--	--
7. Comprehension						
a. Highly effective	14	22	18	34.1	43.1	50.0
b. Moderately effective	17	17	11	41.5	33.3	30.6
c. Effective	7	12	6	17.1	23.5	16.7
d. Moderately ineffective	2	--	1	4.9	--	2.8
e. Highly ineffective	1	--	--	2.4	--	--
8. Approaches to Reading Instruction: Language-Experience						
a. Highly effective	11	16	8	28.2	32.7	22.9
b. Moderately effective	16	21	15	41.0	42.9	42.9
c. Effective	8	11	10	20.5	22.4	28.6
d. Moderately ineffective	3	1	2	7.7	2.0	5.7
e. Highly ineffective	1	--	--	2.6	--	--
f. No response	2	--	1	--	--	--
9. Approaches to Reading Instruction: Individualized Reading						
a. Highly effective	6	11	6	15.8	21.6	17.1
b. Moderately effective	19	25	16	50.0	49.0	45.7
c. Effective	7	14	11	18.4	27.5	31.4
d. Moderately ineffective	4	1	2	10.5	2.0	5.7
e. Highly ineffective	2	--	--	5.3	--	--
f. No responses	3	--	1	--	--	--
10. Additional Approaches to Reading Instruction						
a. Highly effective	4	5	4	18.2	17.9	15.4
b. Moderately effective	8	14	9	36.4	50.0	34.6
c. Effective	10	9	13	45.5	32.1	50.0
d. Moderately ineffective	--	--	--	--	--	--
e. Highly ineffective	--	--	--	--	--	--
f. No responses	19	23	10	--	--	--

Table 1 (cont.)

	<u>Cases</u>			<u>Percent</u>		
	Fall 1974 (N=41)	Spring 1975 (N=51)	Fall 1975 (N=36)	Fall 1974	Spring 1975	Fall 1975
11. Work Study Skills						
a. Highly effective	2	3	--	12.5	12.5	--
b. Moderately effective	2	7	13	12.5	29.1	68.4
c. Effective	7	13	5	43.7	54.2	26.3
d. Moderately ineffective	4	1	1	25.0	4.2	5.3
e. Highly ineffective	1	--	--	6.2	--	--
f. No responses	25	27	17	--	--	--
12. School and Classroom Organization for Individualizing Instruction						
a. Highly effective	2	3	--	22.2	18.7	--
b. Moderately effective	2	3	6	22.2	18.7	46.2
c. Effective	3	8	5	33.3	50.0	38.5
d. Moderately ineffective	1	1	1	11.1	6.2	7.7
e. Highly ineffective	1	1	1	11.1	6.2	7.7
f. No responses	32	35	23	--	--	--
13. Readability						
a. Highly effective	3	6	4	21.4	26.1	17.4
b. Moderately effective	4	9	9	28.6	39.1	39.1
c. Effective	5	7	10	35.7	30.4	43.5
d. Moderately ineffective	1	1	--	7.1	4.3	--
e. Highly ineffective	1	--	--	7.1	--	--
f. No responses	27	28	13	--	--	--
14. Children with Reading Difficulties						
a. Highly effective	9	16	9	50.0	44.4	45.0
b. Moderately effective	2	13	8	11.1	36.1	40.0
c. Effective	5	6	3	27.8	16.7	15.0
d. Moderately ineffective	1	1	--	5.6	2.8	--
e. Highly ineffective	1	--	--	5.6	--	--
f. No responses	23	15	16	--	--	--

Table 2
Student Ratings of Learning Activities in the
Competency-Based Reading Methodology Course

Activity	Cases			Percent		
	Fall 1974 (N=41)	Spring 1975 (N=51)	Fall 1975 (N=36)	Fall 1974	Spring 1975	Fall 1975
1. Professional Readings						
a. Very helpful	29	30	25	70.7	58.8	69.4
b. Helpful	9	16	8	22.0	31.4	22.2
c. Adequate	2	5	3	4.9	9.8	8.3
d. Less helpful	1	--	--	2.4	--	--
e. No help	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. Live Lectures						
a. Very helpful	4	5	6	18.2	14.3	46.2
b. Helpful	9	10	5	40.9	28.6	38.5
c. Adequate	6	6	1	27.3	17.1	7.7
d. Less helpful	2	13	1	9.1	37.1	7.7
e. No help	1	1	--	4.5	2.9	--
f. No responses	19	16	23	--	--	--
3. Seminar/Group Discussions						
a. Very helpful	17	22	8	47.2	53.7	61.5
b. Helpful	11	11	5	30.6	26.8	38.5
c. Adequate	5	6	--	13.9	14.6	--
d. Less helpful	2	2	--	5.6	4.9	--
e. No help	1	--	--	2.8	--	--
f. No responses	5	10	23	--	--	--
4. Individual Conferences						
a. Very helpful	20	27	11	54.1	55.1	35.5
b. Helpful	13	13	14	35.1	26.5	45.2
c. Adequate	4	8	4	10.8	16.3	12.9
d. Less helpful	--	--	2	--	--	6.5
e. No help	--	1	--	--	2.0	--
f. No responses	4	2	5	--	--	--
5. Videotapes						
a. Very helpful	8	18	17	20.5	40.9	53.1
b. Helpful	20	13	8	51.3	40.9	25.0
c. Adequate	10	6	6	25.6	13.6	18.7
d. Less helpful	--	2	1	--	4.5	3.1
e. No help	1	--	--	2.6	--	--
f. No responses	2	7	4	--	--	--

Table 2 (cont.)

	Cases			Percent		
	Fall 1974 (N=41)	Spring 1975 (N=51)	Fall 1975 (N=36)	Fall 1974	Spring 1975	Fall 1975
6. Audiotapes						
a. Very helpful	13	21	23	33.3	42.9	65.7
b. Helpful	15	20	7	38.5	40.8	20.0
c. Adequate	9	6	4	23.1	12.2	11.4
d. Less helpful	1	2	1	2.6	4.1	2.9
e. No help	1	--	--	2.6	--	--
f. No responses	2	2	1	--	--	--
7. Filmstrips						
a. Very helpful	1	3	3	6.7	13.6	25.0
b. Helpful	3	8	8	20.0	36.4	66.7
c. Adequate	7	5	1	46.7	22.7	8.3
d. Less helpful	--	2	--	--	9.1	--
e. No help	4	4	--	26.7	18.2	--
f. No responses	26	29	24	--	--	--
8. Slides/Audiotapes						
a. Very helpful	1	4	4	8.3	20.0	50.0
b. Helpful	4	6	2	33.3	30.0	25.0
c. Adequate	6	4	2	50.0	20.0	25.0
d. Less helpful	--	3	--	--	15.0	--
e. No help	1	3	--	8.3	15.0	--
f. No responses	29	31	28	--	--	--
9. Live Demonstration Lessons						
a. Very helpful	1	2	6	14.3	14.3	85.6
b. Helpful	3	5	1	42.9	35.7	14.3
c. Adequate	1	4	--	14.3	28.6	--
d. Less helpful	--	1	--	--	7.1	--
e. No help	2	2	--	28.6	14.3	--
f. No responses	34	37	29	--	--	--
10. Experiences with Children						
a. Very helpful	32	36	34	80.0	73.5	97.1
b. Helpful	6	8	--	15.0	16.3	--
c. Adequate	1	5	1	2.5	10.2	2.9
d. Less helpful	1	--	--	2.5	--	--
e. No help	--	--	--	--	--	--
f. No responses	1	2	1	--	--	--
11. Manipulation of Materials						
a. Very helpful	13	21	15	32.5	42.9	46.9
b. Helpful	13	19	13	32.5	38.8	40.6
c. Adequate	12	8	2	30.0	16.3	6.2
d. Less helpful	2	1	2	5.0	2.0	6.2
e. No help	--	--	--	--	--	--
f. No responses	1	2	4	--	--	--

Table 3

Student Rating of Postassessment Options in the
Undergraduate Competency-Based Reading Methodology Course

Types of Postassessment	Cases			Percent		
	Fall 1974 (N=41)	Spring 1975 (N=51)	Fall 1975 (N=36)	Fall 1974	Spring 1975	Fall 1975
1. Papers						
a. Highly valuable	9	11	2	22.0	22.4	7.4
b. Very valuable	13	21	10	31.7	42.9	37.0
c. Of moderate value	18	16	13	43.9	32.7	48.1
d. Of little value	1	1	2	2.4	2.0	7.4
e. Of no value	--	--	--	--	--	--
f. No responses	--	2	9	--	--	--
2. Objective Tests						
a. Highly valuable	1	5	5	2.4	9.8	13.9
b. Very valuable	17	21	17	41.5	41.2	47.2
c. Of moderate value	18	23	13	43.9	45.1	36.1
d. Of little value	4	--	1	9.8	--	2.8
e. Of no value	1	2	--	2.4	3.9	--
f. No responses	--	--	--	--	--	--
3. Short Essay Tests						
a. Highly valuable	7	6	9	24.1	15.8	25.7
b. Very valuable	14	11	21	48.3	28.9	60.0
c. Of moderate value	6	21	5	20.7	55.3	14.3
d. Of little value	2	--	--	6.9	--	--
e. Of no value	--	--	--	--	--	--
f. No responses	12	13	1	--	--	--
4. Task Sheets						
a. Highly valuable	8	13	8	19.5	25.5	22.2
b. Very valuable	13	15	12	31.7	29.4	33.3
c. Of moderate value	14	17	12	34.1	33.3	33.3
d. Of little value	4	4	4	9.8	7.8	11.1
e. Of no value	2	2	--	4.9	3.9	--
f. No responses	--	--	--	--	--	--
5. Observations						
a. Highly valuable	12	14	17	36.4	31.1	54.8
b. Very valuable	11	21	10	33.3	46.7	32.3
c. Of moderate value	9	7	4	27.3	15.6	12.9
d. Of little value	--	3	--	--	6.7	--
e. Of no value	1	--	--	3.0	--	--
f. No responses	8	6	5	--	--	--

Table 3 (cont.)

	<u>Cases</u>			<u>Percent</u>		
	Fall 1974 (N=41)	Spring 1975 (N=51)	Fall 1975 (N=36)	Fall 1974	Spring 1975	Fall 1975
6. Projects						
a. Highly valuable	5	7	4	20.8	20.0	19.0
b. Very valuable	9	15	9	37.5	42.9	42.9
c. Of moderate value	10	11	6	41.7	31.4	28.6
d. Of little value	--	2	1	--	5.7	4.8
e. Of no value	--	--	1	--	--	--
f. No response	17	15	15	--	--	--